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SUBJECT: MOU PREVIEWS APRIL 21-24 INTER-KOREAN MINISTERIAL

Classified By: DCM Mark C. Minton. Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In an April 20 preview of the April 21-24 inter-Korean ministerial in Pyongyang, Assistant Minister for Unification Policy and Public Affairs Lee Kwan-sei told the DCM that the ROK planned to urge the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks and agree to the resumption of general officer-level military talks, as well as pursue inter-Korean economic cooperation that was mutually beneficial and less one-sided. South Korea would also call on North Korea to cooperate with the international community on the issue of human rights in the DPRK and agree to establish a joint consultative body with the ROK for preventing and dealing with natural disasters in the Korean Peninsula. Lee acknowledged that Seoul would seek to introduce a resolution to the issue of South Korean abductees and remind Pyongyang of former President Kim Dae-jung's proposed visit to the DPRK. He flatly denied that Seoul would raise the issue of a second inter-Korean summit, adding that he did not know whether Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok would be granted an audience with Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On April 20, Assistant Minister for Unification Policy and Public Affairs Lee Kwan-sei previewed the April 21-24 inter-Korean ministerial to be held in Pyongyang. Lee, noting that the ministerial was the first high-level bilateral contact between the Koreas since December, said Seoul was eager for positive results from the talks, especially since the ROKG was engaging the DPRK under adverse conditions -- including the long delay in the resumption of the Six Party Talks.

NUCLEAR ISSUE: ROK TO URGE EARLY RETURN TO SIX PARTY TALKS

¶3. (C) Lee said the ROK would focus on persuading the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks at the earliest opportunity and make the strategic decision to resolve the nuclear issue. In this regard, South Korea would explain to the North Koreans the perspectives of the international community and the worldwide political climate surrounding the nuclear issue. The ROK would also present its position on the nuclear issue, as well as those of the other participants to the Six Party Talks.

RESUMPTION OF MILITARY TALKS, TWO-SIDED ECON COOPERATION

¶4. (C) According to Lee, the ROK planned to urge the resumption and regularizing of inter-Korean general officer-level military talks, possibly leading to a defense ministerial at some point. The ROK also intended to suggest pursuing inter-Korean economic cooperation with new joint projects that clearly demonstrated benefits to both Koreas, as opposed to one-sided assistance from the ROK. For example, Lee stated, the ROK would suggest the joint usage of the Han River estuary by both Koreas. The intersecting regions of the Imjin and Somjin Rivers had thick aggregates of sand, which the DPRK could sell to South Korean construction firms. Joint extraction projects could also help prevent flooding along the riverbanks and help reduce military tensions in the area, Lee said.

SEOUL TO URGE COOPERATION ON DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

¶5. (C) In addition, the ROK would raise the issue of human rights conditions in North Korea, Lee stated. The South Korean delegation would convey the concerns of the international community on the dismal human rights situation in North Korea candidly to their North Korean counterparts, urging them to cooperate with the international community on the issue. Seoul would also stress that continually denying the charges of human rights violations did not advance Pyongyang's interests.

JOINT BODY ON NATURAL DISASTERS

¶6. (C) Lee added that South Korea also planned to recommend the establishment of an inter-Korean joint consultative body for preventing and dealing with such natural disasters as fires, floods, yellow sand from China's deserts, and outbreak of contagious diseases. Highlighting Seoul's past successes with working with North Korea on meteorological studies on yellow sand, extinguishing fires in North Korea with South Korean helicopters, and providing medical supplies for disease outbreaks, Lee expressed hope that the DPRK would welcome the idea of a consultative body. The ROK delegation would also discuss various joint projects that the two Koreas had agreed upon, but not yet implemented.

SEOUL SEEKS COMPREHENSIVE RESOLUTION OF ABDUCTEE ISSUE

¶7. (C) Responding to the DCM's query, Lee acknowledged that the ROK would press the DPRK on the issue of South Korean abductees. The ROK planned to discuss a comprehensive approach to resolving the issue, broken down in two steps -- determining the welfare and whereabouts of the individuals and arranging reunions with their families, and repatriating them eventually. Noting that Seoul estimated 485 South Koreans were living involuntarily in North Korea, Lee underscored that the ROK was prepared to repatriate these people even if it had to compensate the DPRK for any costs incurred from repatriation. Recalling that both Japan and West Germany had incurred costs while repatriating their citizens from the DPRK and East Germany, respectively, Lee said the ROK had various plans for covering its own costs. The specific format and medium for compensating the DPRK would not, however, be decided until the North Koreans provided specific feedback at the ministerial. (NOTE: The figure above does not include POWs, also thought to number around 500. END NOTE.)

¶8. (C) The DCM asked whether the ROK intended to address, in its comprehensive plan for abductees, other nationals abducted by the DPRK, such as the Japanese. Lee responded the ROK would focus only on ROK citizens, noting that it was difficult enough discussing Korean abductees with the DPRK. Seoul would, however, discuss cases such as South Korean citizen Kim Young-nam, who was reported recently as Japanese abductee Megumi Yokota's husband in North Korea, in the

overall framework of discussing South Korean abductees, Lee said.

ROK TO RAISE KIM DAE-JUNG VISIT, NOT MENTION SECOND SUMMIT

¶9. (C) On the issue of the proposed visit to Pyongyang by former President Kim Dae-jung, Lee explained that the DPRK owed the ROK a response since Kim had planned to visit North Korea per Pyongyang's invitation. As such, the ROK delegation would raise the issue at the ministerial in Pyongyang. The South Koreans would not, however, mention the next inter-Korean summit. The ROK had, on many occasions, conveyed to the DPRK that it was open to another summit regardless of timing or venue and did not believe it was necessary to raise the issue without prompting from the DPRK.

NO CONFIRMED LEE JONG-SEOK-KIM JONG-IL MEETING

¶10. (C) Lee said it was impossible to know whether Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok would be granted an audience with Kim Jong-il. Recalling Kim's past practice of delaying his June 2000 summit with former President Kim Dae-jung by one day, and giving just a few hours' notice to former Unification Minister Chung Dong-young before their June 2005 meeting, Lee stated that current Minister Lee, likewise, would not know whether he was meeting Kim until the actual day of the meeting.

VERSHBOW